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ABSTRACT

The Austin (Texas) Independent School District invited 333 children (pre-kindergarten to grade 5) of black, Hispanic, and other families eligible for Title I services and considered likely to complete a learning program to participate in the 1980 summer At-Home Program, designed to improve the reading skills of low achieving elementary school students. Students received one of eight 10-lesson At-Home reading "sessions" keyed to pre-kindergarten to grade 6 reading abilities. Lessons completed with the parents' help, were returned to the At-Home headquarters in Maryland for grading. Program evaluation was based on the reading achievement gains of the participating students compared to those of a control group: the degree of family participation: the families' use of the materials: and the families' opinions of the project. Based on evaluation by standardized tests, the program had no discernible impact on the students' reading achievement. However, parents helped their children complete an average of 7.7 lessons with only .86 errors per completed lesson. The parents, who showed little variation in their use of the materials, were generally very enthusiastic about the program and many suggested its continuation. The potential changes in the parents' attitudes towards their children's educational progress were important. (SB)

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TITLE I PARENTS AS COMPENSATORY READING INSTRUCTORS:

IS THERE NO PLACE LIKE HOME?

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The program was conducted during the summer of 1980 on Title I elementary campuses in the Austin Independent School District. Families with a child eligible for Title I services, and whom the school's Title I or Title I Migrant reading teacher considered likely to complete the program, were invited to participate.

The At-Home Program is designed to improve the reading skills of low-achieving elementary school children. Participants receive one of eight different reading kits (called "sessions") designed to correspond to their current reading ability. Sessions range in difficulty from pre-kindergarten to sixth-grade reading levels. Each session consists of 10 lessons which are to be completed at home over a ten-week period. The lower level sessions (A, A/B, B, C, and D) provide opportunities for parents to play an active role in their child's reading instruction; the higher level sessions (X, Y, and Z) allow for more independent work on the part of the child.

Completed lessons are sent to the At-Home headquarters in Maryland, where they are corrected by certified teachers and then returned to the students. Additional materials, designed for enrichment or remediation, may be included with the corrected lessons. All participants received a certificate; those who completed all ten lessons also received an At-Home T-shirt. A special banquet, held in mid-August, honored those students whose performance in the program was outstanding.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of program participants by grade level, sex, and ethnicity.

EVALUATION PROCEDURES

The evaluation focused on two general issues. The first issue was the degree of participation on the part of the involved families, the way in which they used the program materials, and their opinions about the program. Two information sources provided data relevant to these questions. The first source was records maintained by the At-Home staff in Maryland. These records included the number of lessons completed and mistakes made by each participant. The second information source was a questionnaire developed by O.R.E. and sent to participating parents (see Attachment 1). The second general issue centered on the reading achievement gains of At-Home students relative to a group of control students. Controls were matched to participants on the basis of grade, sex, ethnicity, school, and pretest scores. For kindergarten students the pretest measure was a spring, 1980, administration of the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts; the posttest was the Metropolitan Readiness Tests, administered in September, 1980.

For the rest of the participants, the pre- and posttests were the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills -- vocabulary and reading comprehension scores for grades 1 to 5, plus word analysis scores for grades 1 and 2. The ITBS pretests were given in April, 1980; the posttests were given in October, 1980. A complete description of the procedures involved in selecting controls; as well as administering and scoring the tests, can be found in the Interim Evaluation Report: 1980 Summer At-Home Reading Program (O.R.E. Publication No: 80.61).

RESULTS

Figure 2 displays the average number of completed lessons and the average number of errors per completed lesson by session level. Figures 3-13 display the number of respondents who endorsed the various response alternatives on the Parent Questionnaire. The results of the achievement analyses are presented in Figures 14-17.

HOW DID PARENTS FEEL ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

Participating parents' feelings about the At-Home Program were assessed with a questionnaire developed by ORE. Parents responded to several multiple-choice items which were designed to tap various aspects of the program itself as well as its administration. Respondents were also invited to write additional comments on the back of the questionnaire.

Responses to the multiple-choice portion of the questionnaire were quite consistent. Most parents were satisfied with the parent training they received, and very few reported any problems in finding assistance when necessary. The majority of the parents thought the lesson instructions were easy to understand, although levels A, B, and D seemed to be somewhat harder for parents to understand than the other levels. Most parents reported that their children enjoyed doing the lessons.

Responses to the open-ended item were also quite positive. That is, most of the respondents indicated they enjoyed the program and many expressed a wish for its continuation in the future. Different parents tended to emphasize different aspects of the program as particularly important to them. For example, several stated they liked the opportunity to interact with their child and that the experience gave them a better appreciation of the child's strengths and weaknesses. Several thought the program was beneficial in terms of maintaining the child's academic skills during the summer vacation, and many noted that their children enjoyed working on the lessons.

However, parents' written comments were not uniformly positive. A few respondents thought the lessons were too easy for their child, while an equal number thought the lessons were too hard. Several parents wanted to see math lessons in addition to the reading lessons. Two parents said they were unable to get help when they needed it, and one wished that the lessons took longer than 15-20 minutes to complete. One parent was disappointed that her child received the same level the child worked on last summer. Three parents felt the program started too early and that it should not start before school ends. Four parents commented on problems they had communicating with program headquarters in Maryland (e.g., being told that only seven lessons were received when all ten had been sent).

To summarize, the parents who participated in the program were generally very enthusiastic about it, many of them expressing a desire for its continuation.

According to the data in Figure 2, the overall average number of complete lessons was nearly eight (out of ten total). This figure also suggests that as the difficulty level of the sessions increased, the number of completed lessons tended to decrease and the number of errors increased.

HOW CAN WE DESCRIBE PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM?

Responses to the Parent Questionnaire indicated that the mother was most frequently the family member who helped the child. Most parents reported that their children did not need a lot of help in completing the lessons, and most lessons were completed in one day. It was initially hoped that information about the way the family worked on the lessons could be related to subsequent achievement gains. Unfortunately, the lack of variability in parents' responses meant that such relationships could not be meaningfully evaluated.

WAS READING ACHIEVEMENT INFLUENCED BY PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM?

The Metropolitan Readiness Tests were used as the posttest for kindergarten participants and controls. Figure 14 shows that there was no measurable effect of the program at the kindergarten level. Figure 15 through 17 show the results of the analyses for grades 1-5 which tested for equal gains between At-Home and control students on the Word Analysis, Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension subscales of the ITBS. These figures reveal no significant effect of At-Home participation in terms of ITBS grade equivalent scores.

Additional analyses, which looked for program effects in terms of specific skills rather than overall grade equivalents, also yielded negative results. Moreover, achievement gains were not related to the number of lessons completed. Nor did students who had participated in the program in previous years make larger gains than those participating for the first time.

One interesting observation drawn from Figures 15-17 is that the program's first graders had, on all three tests, average achievement levels virtually identical to the achievement levels of the second graders. This suggests that the first graders may have been "over-selected" for program participation. That is, they were not as far behind their peers as were students in the other grades.

To summarize, the program apparently had no discernible impact on reading achievement as measured by standardized test scores.

DISCUSSION

ORE has done outcome evaluations of Title I and Migrant summer school programs for several years. The results have consistently failed to yield evidence of an impact of these programs on achievement scores. Moreover, these programs have been much more extensive in scope and duration than the At-Home Reading Program. For example, a summer school might meet all morning five days a week for six weeks and provide about 90 hours of instruction. Therefore, the failure of the present evaluation to detect achievement effects in a program providing 10-20 hours of instruction is not surprising.

However, this failure should not overshadow the high degree of enthusiasm on the part of participating families. Most of the parents seemed genuinely excited about having an opportunity to become actively involved in their children's schooling, and many appeared receptive to future efforts along these lines.

The recent work by Irving Lazar and Richard Darlington (Lazar and Darlington, 1978) may have some relevance to this evaluation. Lazar and Darlington, did a follow-up study of former participants in preschool education programs. They found that the programs had a positive long-term impact on the students when compared with nonparticipants. Interestingly enough, however, they found that the impact was not related to such program characteristics as the child's age upon entry into the program, the length of the program (in months or hours per year), the degree of parental participation, or a number of other variables. In a presentation in Austin, Lazar suggested that somehow the effects the programs had on parents may have been the factor responsible for the positive outcomes. The parents may have become more involved in the education of their children than they would have otherwise. There is some evidence from the study that they had higher expectations for their children than did the parents of nonparticipants.

In reading the written comments added by the parents of At-Home participants, it seems that many parents probably liked the program because

a. it gave them the school's <u>permission</u> to work with their children, and
b. it provided them with specific activities to do with their children.

It is possible that as a result of participation in the program, At-Home parents may feel freer and more confident about monitoring the educational progress of their children. Such changes in parental attitude could have a long-range payoff for the program. In order to test that possibility, 1980 At-Home participants and controls will be followed through the 1980-81 and 1981-82 school years to see if such long-term benefits can be found.

	Male			Female		
Grade	Black	Hispanic	Other	Black	Hispanic	Other
Early Childhood	-	-	-	4	-	-
Kindergarten	9	9	10	6	7	7
1	12	22	15	17	21	16
2	7	11	5	6	17	3
3	4	7	5	8	15	7
4	7	5	5	5	10	3
5	5	3	12	6	12	6
TOTAL	44	57	52	52	82	42

Figure 1. NUMBER OF AT-HOME PARTICIPANTS BY GRADE, SEX, AND ETHNICITY. Four participants did not have ethnicity or sex data on file.

Session Level	Number of Participants	Average Number of Completed Lessons	Average Number of Errors[a]
A	48	7.98	.50
A/B	68	7.93	.49
B	74	7.74	.59
C	35	7.71	1.04
D	38	7.24	1.04
X	27	8.26	1.57
Y	14	6.14	2.83
Z	3	5.00	1.67
TOTAL	307	7.70	.86

[a] Per completed lesson.

Figure 2. MEAN NUMBER OF COMPLETED LESSONS AND ERRORS PER COMPLETED LESSON BY AT-HOME SESSION LEVEL.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Respondents Endorsing Item
I think the instructions were easy to understand.	155	71.1
Sometimes the instructions were hard to understand.	38	17.4
(Both responses).	16	7.3
(No response).	9	4.1

Figure 3. UNDERSTANDING OF LESSON INSTRUCTIONS.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Respondents Endorsing Item
We had problems getting our corrected lessons back from Maryland.	11	5.0
(No response).	210	95.0

Figure 4. INTERACTION WITH PROGRAM HEADQUARTERS.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Respondents Endorsing Item
I wish there were more than ten lessons.	56	25.7
(No response).	162	74.3

Figure 5. DESIRE FOR MORE LESSONS.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Respondents Endorsing Item
I was satisfied with the parent training.	171	78.4
I was not satisfied with the parent training.	4	1.8
I did not get any parent training.	24	11.0
(Got no training and satisfied with training).	6	2.8
(No response).	12	5.5

Figure 6. FEELINGS ABOUT PARENT TRAINING.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Respondents Endorsing Item
I was able to get help when I needed it.	67	30.7
I was not able to get help when I needed it.	4	1.8
(No response).	147	67.4

Figure 7. AVAILABILITY OF HELP FOR PARENTS.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Respondents Endorsing Item
I was told my child might be held back...	6	2.8
(No response).	212	97.2

Figure 8. NUMBER OF PARENTS PRESSURED TO JOIN.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Respondents Endorsing Item
We usually did each lesson in one day.	161	73.9
We usually worked on one lesson several times during the week.	23	10.6
(Both responses).	8	3.7
(No response).	26	11.9

Figure 9. FAMILY WORK STYLE.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Respondents Endorsing Item
Child needed a lot of help with the lessons.	27	12.4
Child did not need a lot of help with the lessons.	140	64.2
(Both responses).	4	1.8
(No responses).	47	21.7

Figure 10. AMOUNT OF PARENTAL ASSISTANCE NEEDED BY CHILD.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Responsents Endorsing Item
Child liked doing the lessons.	173	79.4
Child did not like doing the lessons.	14	6.4
(Both responses).	6	2.8
(No response).	25	11.5

Figure 11. CHILD'S ENJOYMENT OF LESSONS.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing Item	% of Respondents Endorsing Item
"Who usually helped child with the lessons?"		
Mother	133	61.1
(Mother plus someone else).	(48)	(22.0)
Father	12	5.5
(Father plus someone else).	(18)	(8.3)
Sibling	4	1.8
(Sibling plus someone else).	(24)	(11.0)
Other	14	6.4
(Other plus someone else).	(10)	(4.6)
No One	3	1.4
(No one plus someone else).	(7)	(3.2)

Figure 12. FAMILY MEMBER WHO ASSISTED CHILD.

Questionnaire Item	# of Respondents Endorsing item	% of Respondents Endorsing item
"Has child been in the program before?"		
Yes.	40	18.3
No.	178	81.7

Figure 13. NUMBER OF REPEAT PARTICIPANTS.

Measures	N	Mean Raw Score Pretest[a]	Mean Raw Score Posttest	Equal Slopes df	Equal Slopes F	Equal Slopes p	Equal Gains df	Equal Gains F	Equal Gains p
Auditory Skills									
At-Home	24	37.88	17.42	1,44	<1	.81	1,45	<1	.84
Control	24	38.50	17.42						
Visual Skills									
At-Home	24	37.88	15.83	1,44	1.07	.31	1,45	<1	.45
Control	24	38.50	17.46						
Language Arts Skills									
At-Home	24	37.88	10.67		b		1,45	<1	.35
Control	24	38.50	10.75						
Prereading Composite									
At-Home	24	37.88	44.46	1,44	<1	.73	1,45	<1	.92
Control	24	38.50	45.63						

[a]Pretest is total raw score on the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts (Spring, 1980, administration).
[b]The amount of variance accounted for by the two models was virtually identical. Therefore, this test could not be meaningfully evaluated.

Figure 14. COMPARISON OF GAINS MADE BY AT-HOME AND CONTROL STUDENTS ON MRT MEASURES.

Groups	N	Mean Grade Equiv. Pretest	Posttest	Equal Slopes df	F	p	Equal Gains df	F	p
Grade 1									
At-Home	42	1.71	1.96	1,80	<1	.53	1,81	1.84	.18
Control	42	1.79	1.83						
Grade 2									
At-Home	21	1.70	1.75	1,38	<1	.80	1,39	1.05	.31
Control	21	1.85	2.02						

Figure 15. COMPARISON BY GRADE OF WORD ANALYSIS GAINS MADE BY AT-HOME AND CONTROL STUDENTS. Ten-week participants only.

Groups	N	Mean Grade Equiv. Pretest	Posttest	Equal Slopes df	F	p	Equal Gains df	F	p
Grade 1									
At-Home	41	1.68	1.99	1,78	<1	.70	1,79	<1	.69
Control	41	1.60	1.89						
Grade 2									
At-Home	21	1.50	1.75	1,38	1.65	.20	1,39	<1	.44
Control	21	1.58	2.00						
Grade 3									
At-Home	14	2.58	2.71	1,24	1.07	.31	1,25	3.02	.09
Control	14	2.55	3.08						
Grade 4									
At-Home	17	3.64	3.64	1,30	1.67	.20	1,31	3.21	.08
Control	17	3.70	4.05						
Grade 5									
At-Home	21	4.48	4.83	1,38	<1	.60	1,39	<1	.37
Control	21	4.43	4.99						

Figure 16. COMPARISON BY GRADE OF VOCABULARY GAINS MADE BY AT-HOME AND CONTROL STUDENTS. Ten-week participants only.

Groups	N	Mean Grade Equiv. Pretest	Mean Grade Equiv. Posttest	Equal Slopes df	Equal Slopes F	Equal Slopes p	Equal Gains df	Equal Gains F	Equal Gains p
Grade 1									
At-Home	40	1.52	1.95	1,76	2.96	.09	1,77	3.01	.08
Control	40	1.67	1.88						
Grade 2									
At-Home	21	1.78	2.00	1,38	1.95	.17	1,39	<1	.78
Control	21	1.73	1.93						
Grade 3									
At-Home	14	2.81	2.73	1,24	<1	.64	1,25	5.02	.03
Control	14	2.79	3.16						
Grade 4									
At-Home	17	3.49	3.86	1,30	2.65	.11	1,31	<1	.87
Control	17	3.51	3.85						
Grade 5									
At-Home	21	4.31	4.46		a		1,39	<1	.90
Control	21	4.52	4.59						

[a]The amount of variance accounted for by the two models was virtually identical. Therefore, this test could not be meaningfully evaluated.

Figure 17. COMPARISON BY GRADE OF READING COMPREHENSION GAINS MADE BY AT-HOME AND CONTROL STUDENTS. Ten-week participants only.

80.58

AT-HOME QUESTIONNAIRE

Attachment 1

Directions: Read each question carefully. You can mark more than one answer for each question.

Please answer these questions for *(child's name)*.

Remember that you can mark more than one answer for each question.

1. Think about the lessons you and *(child's name)* worked on this summer. Then read the statements below. If you agree with a statement, fill in the circle in front of it.

   0 I think the instructions were easy to understand.
   0 Sometimes the instructions were hard to understand.
   0 We had problems getting our corrected lessons back from Maryland.
   0 I wish there were more than ten lessons.

2. Think about the way the At-Home Program is run by the Austin School District. Then read the statements below. If you agree with a statement, fill in the circle in front of it.

   0 I was satisfied with the parent training.
   0 I was not satisfied with the parent training.
   0 I did not get any parent training.
   0 I was able to get help when I needed it.
   0 I was not able to get help when I needed it.
   0 I was told *(child's name)* might be held back in school if we did not join the At-Home Program.

3. Think about the way you and *(child's name)* worked on the lessons this summer. Then read the statements below. If a statement is true, fill in the circle in front of it.

   0 We usually did each lesson in one day.
   0 We usually worked on one lesson several times during the week.
   0 *(child's name)* needed a lot of help with the lessons.
   0 *(child's name)* did not need a lot of help with the lessons.
   0 *(child's name)* liked doing the lessons.
   0 *(child's name)* did not like doing the lessons.

4. Who usually helped *(child's name)* with the lessons?

   0 father 0 mother 0 sister or brother 0 other 0 no one

5. Has *(child's name)* been in the At-Home Program before?

   0 Yes 0 No

17

On the back of this questionnaire, please write any other comments about the At-Home Program.